

Toronto Caribbean Carnival is a Celebration of Emancipation

- The first Toronto Caribbean Carnival (formerly known as Caribana) occurred in Toronto in 1967.
- The first 'Caribana' was organized as a one-time event and part of Canada's Expo 67 Centennial celebrations by the Caribbean Cultural Committee.
- Since 2015, the festival's official name has been the Toronto Caribbean Carnival, although it is still commonly referred to as Caribana by many. [Source](#)

History of Toronto Caribbean Carnival (Caribana)

- The Toronto Caribbean Carnival is rooted in Trinidad and Tobago's Carnival.
- The festival, which initially catered to the White French and French Creole elite in Trinidad, showcased masks and costumes influenced by African and Afro-Creole traditions.
- Enslaved Africans created their parallel celebrations called cannes brûlées or canboulay, during which they imitated their French masters by painting their faces white and donning unusual costumes. [Source](#)
- After the abolition of slavery, the festival underwent a major transformation as freed Africans incorporated their customs, leading to the white elite distancing themselves from Carnival events. [Source](#) This shift paved the way for the contemporary celebration of Caribana.
- **Festival events include** calypso "tents" (shows), "jump-ups" (dances), "fetes" (parties), "mas" (masquerade) competitions, a junior carnival, "pan blockos" or "blockoramas" (steel band street parties), and "talk tents" (shows featuring storytellers, comedians, and others well versed in oral traditions). [Source](#)
- The multi-week Toronto Caribbean Carnival takes place from late July to early August and aligns with Emancipation Day (August 1) which commemorates the abolition of slavery in the British colonies on this date in 1834.
- **This is why the Toronto Caribbean Carnival ends with a grand parade featuring masquerades parading through the street, reminiscent of 19th-century freedom celebrations.** [Source](#)

This resource was developed by the Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Accessibility and Anti-Racism Office (IDEAA). If you have any comments or would like to suggest a resource, please e-mail ideaa@hollandbloorview.ca

